



Chemical emergencies do not respect international boundaries

Emergency Preparedness

Sister City Cooperation

Border Challenge:

The U.S.-Mexico border area is a dynamic region having a distinct composition that is as much differentiated by social, economic, and political contrasts as it is bound by cultural fusion and the unique interdependency of its transborder city pairs. It is also one of the most rapidly growing regions in each country. Many factors associated with that growth, such as increases in commercial activity, traffic congestion, and consumption of natural resources, have been linked to environmental degradation and deterioration of the quality of life. Given the complex structure of the stakeholders that have border interests – two sovereign countries, 10 border states, several municipalities and counties, tribal nations, national and international organizations, and the residents of the border – addressing those concerns requires a coordinated, binational response.

EPA Accepts the Challenge:

The two countries responded to the challenge of transcending their borders-- their social, economic and political differences in 1983 with the “La Paz Agreement.” A document that established a framework for cooperation between the two countries to prevent, reduce and eliminate sources of air, water, and land pollution in the border area. From this agreement sprang the U.S.-Mexico Joint Contingency Plan for responding to hazardous material leaks or spills along the border. There are fourteen sister city pairs along the U.S-Mexico border region. Eight are in the Region 6 border area; McAllen/Reynosa, Laredo/Nuevo Laredo, Brownsville/Matamoros, Weslaco/Rio Bravo, Del Rio/Ciudad Acuna, Eagle Pass/Piedras Negras, Columbus/Las Palomas, Presidio/Ojinago, El Paso/Ciudad Juarez. Seven of these city pairs now have sister city contingency plans in place. The El Paso/Ciudad Juarez plan is in progress.

Binational sister city plans provide the mechanism for locals to address issues or concerns, and allow appropriate recommendations in decisions that will affect both communities along the border. The plans establish a binational notification system, procedures for quick mobilization of emergency response personnel and equipment, and the distribution and education, in Spanish and English, of software for use in the development of local emergency plans. The plans have resulted in the cross training of personnel, exercises to test the procedures, and the development of webpages for information related to contingency planning and emergency response in the border area.

Since September 2000, Region 6 has been involved in six major International exercises. The events include training for first responders in Spanish and English as well as a field exercise. The latest binational exercise, May 31- June 4, 2004,



improved coordination and communication between the sister cities of McAllen, Texas and Reynosa, Tamulipas at the local, state and federal level on both sides of the border for the possible threat of a terrorist incident involving hazardous materials.